

# **Midwinter Bald Eagle Counts St. Croix National Scenic Riverway 1999 - 2004**

## **Introduction**

St. Croix National Scenic Riverway (Riverway) has annually participated in a Midwinter Bald Eagle Count coordinated by Eagle Nature Foundation Ltd. since 1999. This count officially occurs on a weekend in late January but our count is primarily conducted on the preceding Friday. An attempt is made to observe all eagles within and adjacent to the Riverway. Because the count is part of a much larger count attempting to capture a region-wide number of birds, observations from outside the Riverway are also included, but generally not on staff time. In 2003 Riverway staff also participated in the Bald Eagle Midwinter Count coordinated by U.S. Geological Service. It is hoped to migrate to this count as the Riverway's primary survey in the future.

## **Methods**

These counts have had varying levels of participation by staff and volunteers over the years. For example, in 2000, nearly a dozen observers participated. That remains the only year that the Stillwater to Prescott portion of the St. Croix River was included in the count. Typically one to five participants actively search for eagles.

Participants search for eagles by accessing the St. Croix and Namekagon rivers at as many points as possible. Access is sometimes restricted by road closures due to accumulated snow. These access points include landings, campsites, bridge crossings, overlooks, wayside rests and other selected known access points. The same locations are often visited each year. For each location, participants are asked to record date, time, location, direction of flight if flying, and numbers and age of each eagle observed (adult, immature or unknown). Participants are sometimes assigned overlapping territories to search and these details are used to eliminate possible duplication of observed eagles.

## **Results and Discussion**

Most of the bald eagles residing in the Riverway during the summer migrate south for the winter. However, if enough water remains open, many eagles will remain throughout the winter. Some pairs regularly remain for the winter such as the pair found each year below the dam at St. Croix Falls, Wisconsin. This may be the pair that nests nearby in Wisconsin's Interstate State Park. Mild weather or lingering autumn weather may tempt additional birds to remain in the area longer or even stay throughout the entire winter. This, combined with weather conditions during the count, varying numbers of observers, and varying coverage of the Riverway each year, results in wide-ranging numbers of eagles found each year (Figure 1).

In 2004, there were four active participants with approximately 21 hours of search time. At least 34 points were accessed in 2004 between Stillwater, Minnesota to Pansy Landing north of Danbury, Wisconsin. The detailed results of the 2004 count are shown in Table 2. Seventeen eagles were observed including one adult approximately 10 miles east of the St. Croix River in

Balsam Lake Township, Polk County. The 2004 count represents two more eagles observed than the average number of 15 counted between 1999 and 2004.

Despite the inconsistency in the data collection, at least two facts are clear: 1) The St. Croix National Scenic Riverway currently provides suitable habitat for bald eagles, and; 2) Overwintering adult eagles significantly outnumber immature birds. Between 1999 and 2004, only 32% of those birds identified by age were immature birds. This is a consistent pattern except for 2001 when only 5 birds were observed.

Table 1. Results of the midwinter bald eagle counts at St. Croix National Scenic Riverway, 1999 to 2004. Two unknown age birds are included in the 2004 count total. ENF is the Eagle Nature Foundation count, USGS is the U.S. Geological Service count.

Year	ENF Adult	ENF Imm.	ENF Total	USGS Adults	USGS Imm.	USGS Total	Notes
1999	6	0	6				
2000	18	6	24				Includes 11 eagles Hastings to Kinnickinnic
2001	2	3	5				
2002	22	7	29				
2003	6	1	7	16	14	31	
2004	11	4	17				

Table 2. Results of the 2004 Midwinter Bald Eagle Count at St. Croix National Scenic Riverway.

<b>Date</b> 1/23/2004 - 1/25/2004		<b>Observers</b> Robin Maercklein, Byron Karns, Randy Ferrin and Don Brown				
<b>Location</b> St. Croix River, Minnesota and Wisconsin						
Time	Location	Adults	Sub-Adult	Immatures	Unknown	Total
8:52	Nevers Dam upstream	1				1
9:45	Nevers Dam Launch	1			1	2
9:40	Wild River State Park		1			1
10:15	St. Croix Falls Lions Club	1				1
10:23	St. Croix Falls Overlook	1				1
11:20	Taylors Falls Lions Club	1				1
11:30	MN Interstate/Highway 8	1				1
13:41	Boomsite Wayside, Stillwater MN	1				1
15:35	St. Croix Islands WI Wildlife Area	1				1
16:52	MN Interstate Park/Highway 8	1				1
14:44	MN Interstate Park/Highway 8	1				1
8:26	River Rd, north of Wolf Creek, WI		2			2
15:53	Crex Meadows, Grantsburg, WI				1	1
15:45	Balsam Branch, Balsam Lake, WI	1				1
13:55	Stevens Creek Landing, MN	2				
14:35	Old RR Bridge Landing, MN		1			
16:35	Marine-on-St. Croix, MN	1				1
	<b>Totals</b>	11	4	0	2	17

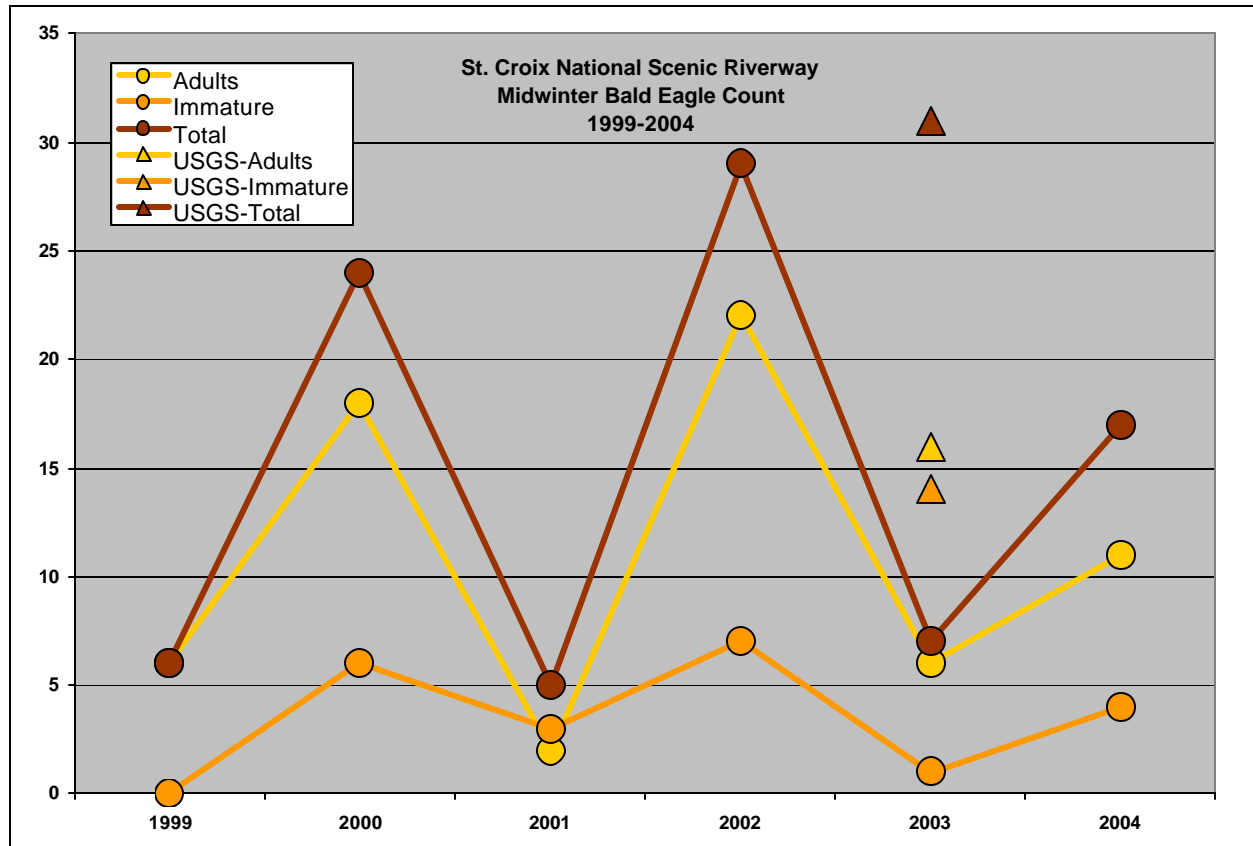


Figure 1. Totals from the midwinter bald eagle counts at St. Croix National Scenic Riverway. Totals also include eagles of unknown age (2004 only).

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